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2010

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Illinois Environmental Protection Agency  
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JUL 16 2010

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## Middletown Open Burning Factsheet

May, 2010

### Background

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency has received numerous complaints about open burning of waste in the Village of Middletown. The Illinois EPA has put together this factsheet to clarify the State of Illinois' laws concerning open burning.

### Can I burn waste in a burn barrel or on the ground in Middletown?

The Village of Middletown is an incorporated town. By state law, **it is illegal to burn any waste except for landscape waste** (grass or shrubbery cuttings, leaves, tree limbs and other materials accumulated as the result of the care of lawns, shrubbery, vines and trees) in an incorporated area. Prohibition of the open burning of waste has been a part of the Environmental Protection Act since 1970.

Landscape waste can only be burned on the property it was generated or on a site designated and overseen by the municipality. Local municipalities may also ban or regulate the burning of landscape waste; however, to the Illinois EPA's knowledge the Village of Middletown has not restricted the burning of landscape waste.

### Why should I be concerned about the open burning of household waste?

The nature of household trash has changed over the past fifty years. Today, bleached paper, plastic packaging or plastic products and printed materials with toxic chemicals make up a large portion of society's waste. These items contain chemical dyes, coatings, pigments and chlorine that can form even more toxic chemicals when burned. In fact, chlorine is present in most household waste, even paper products.

### What pollutants are emitted from open burning?

An estimated 5,000 tons of pollutants are emitted annually from open burning of household waste. Particulates, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide represent the largest portion of these pollutants. Because burn barrels receive little oxygen, they create low temperature fires that generate other toxic pollutants such as benzene, styrene oxide, formaldehyde, dioxins and furans. Dioxins are produced in burn barrels at a rate more than two times greater than from municipal incinerators. Some metals such as lead, cadmium and chromium are also released.

### Can these chemical emissions harm my family's health?

Yes. These pollutants are released into the air where they can be inhaled by those closest to or downwind from the source. They also deposit on leafy plants that are eaten by livestock. Dioxin accumulates in animal fat and is passed through meat and dairy products to humans. Depending on how long and how often you are exposed, certain pollutants can harm the lungs, kidneys, the nervous system and the liver. Short-term exposure can aggravate asthma and affect other respiratory conditions. Long-term exposure can lead



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to an increased risk of cancer or heart disease, and respiratory, reproductive and developmental problems.

### Why should I stop burning?

- If you live in Middletown and openly burn materials other than landscape waste, you are breaking the law and could be fined or arrested if you continue.
- Burn barrels are the most significant remaining source of dioxin in the U.S. and produce a variety of other toxins.
- Your individual choices impact the quality of everyone's food supply.
- Your health and the health of your family and neighbors may depend on it.
- There is a risk of uncontrolled fires.

### What alternatives do I have to burning?

Contact a local garbage hauler about disposal options.

- **REDUCE** extra packaging by buying in bulk. Avoid buying disposable items; buy durable, repairable items.
- **REUSE** by donating unwanted clothing, furniture, toys and electronics to friends or charities. Give old magazines and books to hospitals or nursing homes. Repair rather than discard or replace.
- **RECYCLE** junk mail, magazines, newspapers, office paper, cardboard, aluminum, tin, metal and acceptable plastics. Return plastic bags to stores that recycle them.
- **COMPOST** food, lawn and garden waste.

### Who can I complain to about someone burning?

911 should be called to complain about non-landscape waste that is currently burning.

Local law enforcement officials have the authority to enforce the prohibitions against the open burning of domicile waste, garbage and trade waste.

### Who can I contact if I have further questions?

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May, 2010

Printed by authority of the  
State of Illinois  
36488 300 05-2010